PRISON DIETARIES (IRELAND).

RETURN to an Order of the Honourable The House of Commons, dated 6 March 1868;—*for*,

COPY "of CIRCULAR addressed by Inspectors General of Prisons to the Board of Superintendence of Irish County Prisons in reference to the proposed Alteration in the PRISON DIETARIES."

CIRCULAR No. 235.

Office of Inspectors General of Prisons,
Dublin Castle, 2 March 1868.

Gentlemen,

THE report of the Medical Committee appointed by the Lord Lieutenant to inquire into the dietaries of the county and borough gaols of Ireland having been completed, we have the honour to apprise you that it contains two classes of recommendations for alteration in the prison dietaries; the one prospective, and based on the assumption that the English system of hard labour will he extended to Ireland by the Legislature, and the other framed to come into immediate operation, pending such intended legislation. With the former we have not at present to deal, but having submitted the latter for approval, in accordance with the 84th and 85th sections of the Prisons' Act, the 7 Geo. 4, c. 74, to the Lord Lieutenant, to whom the jurisdiction was transferred by the 3rd section of the 19 & 20 Vict. c. 68, and having received the sanction of his Excellency, we have now to inform you that, until the English system of hard labour be introduced into the Irish gaols, the subjoined dietaries are to be substituted for those now in force, and are to be forthwith established.

We beg to call your special attention to the recommendations of the Committee as to the nature and the quality of the food, and the proportions of admixture, and the preparation of the several items, and also to the accompanying extracts from the report referred to, which bear directly upon the altered dietary now promulgated.

We have, &c.

(signed) *J. Corry Connellan*, } Inspectors General
John Lentaigne, } of Prisons.

The Board of Superintendence,
Gaol.

DIETARIES.

1. DIETARY for Prisoners whose term of Imprisonment shall not exceed One Week.

Class 1, Males.—Breakfast—8 oz. meal, in stirabout, and half pint new milk. Dinner—14 oz. bread, and 1 pint vegetable soup.

Class 2, Females.—Breakfast—7 oz. meal, in stirabout, and half pint new milk. Dinner—12. oz. bread, ¾ pint vegetable soup.

Class 3, Males and Females under 15 Years.—Breakfast—5 oz. meal, in stirabout, and half pint new milk. Dinner—Not less than 8 oz. brown bread, and 1 pint vegetable soup. Supper—4 oz. brown bread.

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2. DIETARY for Prisoners whose term of Imprisonment shall exceed One Week, for Untried Prisoners who do not Maintain themselves, and for Pauper Debtors.

Class 1, Males.—Breakfast, 8 oz. meal, in stirabout, and half pint new milk. Dinner—14 oz. bread, and 1 pint new milk. Supper—6 oz. bread, and half pint new milk.

Class 2, Females.—Breakfast—7 oz. meal, in stirabout, and half pint new milk. Dinner—12 oz. bread, and ¾ pint new milk. For Supper—5 oz. bread, and half pint new milk.

Class 3, Males and Females under 15 Years.—Breakfast—5 oz. oatmeal, and half pint new

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new milk. Dinner—Not less than 8 oz. brown bread, and 1 pint of vegetable soup. Supper—5 oz. bread, and half pint new milk.

Potatoes are to be substituted for bread at dinner on three days in the week, in the following proportions:—Class 1, 3 lbs.; Class 2, 2½ lbs.; Class 3, 2¼ lbs.

Roman Catholic prisoners, on the first and last Wednesdays in Lent, and on Good Friday, are to receive in place of milk, 2 oz. molasses at breakfast, vegetable soup at dinner, and tea without milk at supper on those days.

The meal directed in the above Tables to be used at breakfast may be oatmeal, or mixed meal, composed of equal parts of oatmeal and Indian meal. Vegetable soup should be made according to the following formula:—Add to one gallon of boiling water 8 ozs. of oatmeal, blended in a little cold water, 2 lbs. of turnips peeled and sliced, 4 ozs. of onions cut small, and as much pepper and salt as will make it palatable; when boiled for one hour it is fit for use—parsnips or carrots may be substituted for turnips. The bread is to be made of wholemeal, or of equal parts of seconds flour and wholemeal. The tea is to be made with half a pound of tea and one pound of sugar to four gallons of water, and one quart of new milk. Buttermilk may be used instead of new milk once a day, either at breakfast or dinner, if the surgeon approve of the change; and the equivalents shall be for every half pint of new milk one pint of butter milk.

Extracts from the Report of the Committee.

We are strongly in favour of the introduction of the potato into the prison dietaries. It is right, however, to refer to the fact that for years past the potato crop in Ireland has been an uncertain one, and that even in the best seasons the "potato blight" has been met with in some localities; the cost, too, rises considerably in the summer months, yet by careful storing, or by a fair contract, there seems no reason why this article of food, to which the people have been so long accustomed, should not be provided and given with sufficient liberality. At Castlebar, potatoes are supplied by yearly contract at 4 *d.* a stone. It is required that they should be washed before delivery at the prison; and before they are boiled, they are picked by some of the prisoners, and those found to be bad are rejected.

And this opens another consideration, namely, the question of the bulk of food. An Irish labourer will often consume half a stone of potatoes at a meal, but if he has kitchen with his meal, that is a bit of bacon, or eggs, or salt herring, or dripping, or milk, a quarter or a third of a stone will suffice. Now it is plain that to people accustomed to this bulk of diet, a meal in smaller quantity, even though it might be equally or more nutritious, will not be so satisfying. And this explains the circumstance that there is often at first a falling away in the condition of the inmates of prisons, coupled with an inaptitude to labour, but that after a time the system seems to recover.

We have to propose, in addition to the use of potatoes, other modifications in the prison dietary as established, viz., the introduction of vegetable soup, and, prospectively, of soup made with both meat and vegetables. We also propose to give to certain classes of prisoners tea at the supper meal. These changes will affect both the quality and the quantity of food, and facilitate the carrying out the principle of variety in the diet.

It is the practice at the Westmeath County Gaol to give a vegetable soup, and we have found it of most excellent quality; it was composed of oatmeal, onions, carrots, and turnips, with the condiments of pepper and salt. It was hot, savoury, and not thin, and appeared to us a most relishing article of diet.

It is unnecessary for us to dilate on the advantages of a supply of well-dressed vegetable food, and in this country it will have an additional value as a substitute for the potato, when that esculent is scarce or of inferior quality.

With respect to the quality of food to be employed, it is unnecessary for us to state that it should be of the best. To provide bad food, by accepting the lowest tender, must be the worst economy. We have already given our testimony as to the excellent nature of the supplies of bread, meal, and milk, in most of the prisons which we have visited, and have stated our opinion that to this circumstance the good health of the prisoners is in a large measure to be attributed. In two gaols we found the milk poor; in one decidedly bad. Yet in those, as in other places, the duty of inspecting and reporting on the food is entrusted to the chaplains. We are of opinion that this arrangement requires modification.

In every prison a daily inspection of the food should be made by the governor or surgeon, or by both; and as regards the question of milk, every prison should be provided with a lactometer and cream tube. Yet it is obvious that if Boards of Superintendence contract for milk, which has been the only substitute for meat in our prison dietaries, at 40 per cent. under the market price, no regulation would avail.

The specific gravity of good milk should be from 1028 to 1035, and the lower specific gravity does not necessarily imply an inferior milk, as it may be caused by a larger proportion of cream. Hence the necessity of the use of the cream tube as well as that of the lactometer.

We cannot too strongly insist on the importance of providing good milk. In the Irish as in the Scotch prison dietaries, milk has been the only substitute for meat, and it is much

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much to be regretted that this all-important source of nourishment should be rendered defective by the practice of a false economy, or that the want of a proper vigilance on the part of those whose duty it is to examine the supply, should afford an opportunity for fraudulent adulteration of the article.

In our proposed dietary we recommend an increased quantity of new milk for all classes of prisoners, and that, with the sanction of the surgeon, buttermilk may be substituted at breakfast or dinner; in the proportion of one pint of the latter in lieu of half a pint of the former.

We recommend that the bread for prisoners should be made with whole wheatenmal or with equal parts of wholemeal and seconds flour. In the Westmeath County Gaol it was the practice formerly to prepare the bread from the flour ground in the prison, by which a perfectly wholesome bread was obtained. But owing to the great diminution of late years in the number of prisoners who could be employed at the mill, this system has been discontinued.

We propose that prisoners of all classes should receive for breakfast certain quantities of meal made into stirabout or porridge; the meal may be either oatmeal or equal parts of oatmeal and Indian meal. With regard to the former, care should be taken that it has been sufficiently cleaned and dried. In the Westmeath County Prison there is a mill and kiln for the preparation of oatmeal, by which a supply of the very purest and best article is obtained. The proper drying of the meal insures the safety of its storage as well as its improvement as an article of diet, whether we consider it as to its quality, or the bulk of the mese of porridge for each prisoner; and we see no reason why the authorities of other prisons should not adopt the same system which has been the practice in the Westmeath County Gaol, where oatmeal is seldom used until it has been made at least 12 months; that at present in use has been in store for a year and a half. The drying gives a greater amount of nutriment for an equal weight of the oatmeal. We have ascertained that 8 oz. of oatmeal, if in good condition, as just described, will weigh about 3 lbs. when made into stirabout.

We recommend that Indian meal, when used, should always be in combination with oatmeal. To make a digestible porridge of the admixture of the two meals requires, however, careful manipulation, inasmuch as the Indian meal takes a longer time to cook than oatmeal. The meal from the European maize is to be preferred to that of America.

In all cases the stirabout or porridge should be served hot.

As to the use of simple gruel, especially as a substitute for milk, we recommend its discontinuance. It is an article not in use by the people, and is only acceptable to prisoners on account of its being served warm. Its nutritive value is of the lowest.

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COPY of a CIRCULAR addressed by Inspectors General of Prisons to the Board of Superintendence of Irish County Prisons in reference to the proposed Alteration in the Prison DIETARIES

(*Earl of Mayo*)

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,
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